



The President's Daily Brief

February 17, 1976

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Exempt from general
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exemption category 5B(1)(2)(3)
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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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SPANISH SAHARA

*Moroccan and Algerian troops may
have clashed again in the Spanish Sahara.*

King Hassan, in a message to President Boumediene on Sunday, charged that Algerian troops had attacked Moroccan forces at Amgala the previous day. The oasis was the scene of a clash late last month between Moroccan and Algerian forces supporting Polisario Front guerrillas. A Moroccan officer told our defense attaché in Rabat that an estimated regimental-size Algerian force had overrun the Moroccan defenders at the oasis. The officer speculated that the Algerians wanted to avenge their earlier defeat at Amgala.

We cannot confirm that Algerian troops conducted the attack. The Moroccan version may be accurate, although it probably exaggerates the size of the attacking force. An Algerian broadcast denied that Algerian troops were involved, alleging that Polisario Front guerrillas were responsible. The radio commentary emphasized that Algeria will continue to support the Front in its struggle for independence.

The Algerian reaction suggests that Boumediene still wants to avoid a direct confrontation with Morocco. King Hassan, on the other hand, in his message to Algeria challenged Boumediene either to accept an internationally guaranteed peace in Spanish Sahara or openly declare war on Morocco.

NOTES

The unmanned Soviet Soyuz-20 spacecraft yesterday separated from the Salyut-4 space station and returned to the USSR after 91 days in orbit.

We believe this mission was a precursor to the launch of a manned spacecraft that will attempt to set a new record for manned space flights. The launch probably will occur within the next few months and will last about 90 days. The US Skylab-3 crew was in orbit for 84 days in 1974.

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The EC Nine are moving toward diplomatic recognition of the Popular Movement as the sole government of Angola.

Some reports from the current EC political directors' meeting in Luxembourg indicate that final arrangements are being worked out and the announcement will be made this week.

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